





## Selling the Land, Redeeming the Land

Rabbi Yakov Haber

Among the mitzvos relevant to land in Eretz Yisrael delineated in parashas Behar is the commandment regulating the sale of ancestral agricultural land. All such land cannot be sold permanently; the land returns to its original owner at yoveil (25:13,28) and, in light of this, the purchase price reflects the number of years until the yoveil (ibid. 15-16). Thus, selling ancestral land is more similar to a lease rather than to a sale.

The Torah provides for three ways in which the land can return to its original owner. The first entails a relative of the seller paying the balance left to the "purchase price" dependent on how many years have lapsed under the ownership of the buyer (v. 25). For example, if there were ten years left to yoveil and the land was "leased" for \$10,000 and three years elapsed, the "redemption" price would be \$7,000. The second method consists of the seller himself redeeming the land in a similar way (v. 26-27). On a simple level, the reason that this option is not mentioned first is that the seller needed the money he received for the sale for basic needs and usually would not have funds available to buy back his land; a relative, though, might, as the Torah states: "When your brother (relative) becomes impoverished and sells his ancestral land..." (v. 25). However, the seller might find funds from some other source at some point before yoveil and wish to redeem his land; in such a case, the Torah compels the buyer to honor this request. The final way in which the land returns is, as mentioned above, when yoveil arrives and the "leasing price" has been expended; then the land returns to the seller without a need for any compensation from the seller to the buyer (v. 28).

Ohr HaChayim presents an enlightening teaching concerning the process of redemption of the Jewish people alluded to by this set of halachos. Here we summarize his approach with some additions. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 98a) teaches that there are two basic methods through which redemption can occur. The prophet Yeshaya states concerning the Final Redemption: "ani Hashem b'ita achishena - I, G-d, will rush it (the redemption) in its time" (60:22). Commenting on the seeming self-contradiction in this passuk - "on time" is not "rushed" - R' Yehoshua ben Levi answers that if the Jewish people merit, the redemption will be rushed; if not, it will come on time. Elsewhere (ibid. 97b) the Gemara records two views concerning the cause of redemption. Whereas R' Eliezer's view is that national repentance is a necessary precondition for redemption, R' Yehoshua maintains that redemption can occur even without teshuva. Presumably, though, R' Yehoshua agrees to R' Eliezer's contention that redemption can come earlier as a result of national teshuva.[1] In light of the above, Ohr HaChayim teaches that selling land in Eretz Yisrael alludes to Hashem's "selling" his inheritance, namely, the mikdash, and allowing it to be seized and destroyed by our enemies. The righteous leaders of the generation are charged to redeem the inheritance of "their relative", a reference to the close connection that the righteous have with G-d. How do they accomplish this? By leading their generation in national repentance, they can bring about a "rushed" redemption and restore the "relative's", i.e. Hashem's, mikdash.[2]

But if this does not occur, there is another possibility of rushing the redemption. The Jewish people themselves, even if they do not repent, can atone for their sins through the suffering that they undergo in the exile. This is the purpose of the chevlei Mashiach, the tumultuous, painful world events preceding the messianic era. This is similar to the extra harsh labor in Egypt which, according to many commentaries, was brought about by Hashem to rush the redemption after only 210 years of exile before its predetermined 400 year timeframe. This track is parallel to the seller redeeming his own field. But even if both of these approaches fail - neither national repentance occurs nor can the Jewish people withstand the necessary yissurin to expiate their sins and rush the redemption, the ge'ula will occur in its time even without repentance. This approach is prophesied by the prophet Yechezkel: Therefore, tell the House of Israel: So says Hashem Elokim: I do not act for your sake, House of Israel, rather for My Holy Name which you have desecrated among the nations which you have entered. And I shall sanctify My great Name which is desecrated among the nations...and all the nations shall know that I am Hashem...when I am sanctified through you before their eyes. And I shall take you from the nations, and I shall gather you from all the lands and bring you to your own soil. And I shall sprinkle pure waters upon you and you shall be purified from all of your contaminations...And I shall give you a new heart and a new spirit I shall place in you...And I shall arrange it so that you shall walk in My statutes and My laws you will keep and do. And you shall dwell on your land and you shall be a nation unto Me and I shall be your G-d. (36:22-28)

It would appear from this passage that although the beginning of the redemption process can occur without teshuva, the final stage will indeed be accompanied by repentance enabling the Jewish people to be in a state fitting for the elevated spiritual state of the world at the time of the Final Redemption.

The Chafetz Chayim was once asked that if the generations of the holy Tanna'im and Amoraim did not merit redemption, if the generations of the Rambam and Ramban were not redeemed, if the generations of the Noda BiHuda and the Chasam Sofer remained in exile, with such great leaders and most of the Jewish people observing Torah and mitzvos, how can we in our generation with lesser leaders and so many Jews no longer loyal to Torah and mitzvos expect to rush redemption? The Chafetz Chaim responded based on the Ohr HaChayim's remez. As the seller approaches closer and closer to yoveil, the "buy-back" price becomes less and less. True we might not be on the level of previous generations. But since they were more distant from the final date of redemption, they required a greater degree of repentance and yissurin to merit a rushed one. We, on the other hand, who are living much closer to the final date and have in our "wallet" all of the accumulated merits of all of the previous generations, can bring about a rushed redemption even with a much lesser level of suffering and teshuva.

The world as we encounter it today is quite a frightening place. External threats to the security of the State of Israel and Jewish people are everywhere, internal threats of nouveau "religious" practices threatening the stability of our mesora, and the general breakdown of moral and family values in general society all form part of a web of a seemingly hopeless state. An awareness of the fact that our steadfastness to the values of the Torah in these tumultuous times not only assures our personal and national eternity but also impacts upon the time of the Final Redemption serves to strengthen our efforts at remaining loyal to Hashem, His Torah, and His mitzvos.

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